

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Monday, January 17, 2022

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start off the afternoon session with the 2021 NTT INDYCAR SERIES champion, the driver of the No. 10 NTT Data Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing, Alex Palou.

The first question will be the easy one: how tough do you think it will be to defend the championship?

ALEX PALOU: It's always tough. 2021 was really, really tough what we went through learning with a new team, learning still some racetracks, still learning how to race with the INDYCAR.

Yeah, it was a good year. I think we'll have a lot of competition this year. We have new drivers in different teams. We have new drivers from other places. It's going to be challenging. But, yeah, we've been working as if last year we lost it and I think we'll be ready to try and fight again.

THE MODERATOR: You walk into the room, you're not going to sneak up on anybody now. Last year I think winning the first race, putting yourself in title contention, may have been a surprise. Do you feel any extra pressure this year coming in as the defending champion?

ALEX PALOU: No. I think we always have pressure in all kind of sports, but especially motorsport where you need to show your potential in order to get a new contract, right? We always have pressure, but I don't think I have added pressure from last year. I would say I even have less.

But I don't think that's a good or bad thing. We already showed we're capable of winning a championship, winning races and being up there. We just need to do it again.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Your off-season, what has it been like? I know some of the championship things you got to do. What has it been like for you? A bit of a whirlwind or have you had time to let it soak in?

ALEX PALOU: Oh, yeah. I think three weeks or four weeks after Long Beach it was really busy. I didn't really have time to sit down and just relax.

But, yeah, then I flew to Spain with the family. I did some trips over there. I had some vacation. So, yeah, it was good time, good family time, good relaxing time. Was good for preparation.

Q. How were you celebrated in Spain? How did the Spanish media and fans celebrate your accomplishment? Was it a big deal to them?

ALEX PALOU: It was good. It was great. I think it was great. I think it's growing over there. Obviously having somebody from Spain winning the championship makes INDYCAR a bit more known in Spain. Yeah, hopefully we can keep it going and getting even more fans.

Q. Last year you said having Jimmie Johnson to be able to bounce ideas off of is very important to you because he knows how to be a champion, helped you become a champion. Now he's going to be full-time. How much are you going to be able to use that to your benefit, to have a guy like that?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I would say same as what we did in 2021. He only skipped like three or four races, so it was not much. He was always on the racetrack or at the phone. I see him a lot. It's great.

But not only him, also having T.K., he's going for another Indy 500. And having Scott Dixon there also. As I said, it's a great group of guys. I think it's even stronger than last year because we didn't really know each other. Yeah, should be a good year.

Q. You said towards the end of last season when Scott has been helping you out that you hoped that winning the championship he would continue to answer your questions. Has that been the case so far?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we didn't really talk too much. Yeah, we did, but not about racing.

But, yeah, as soon as we get back to racing in Daytona this week and next week, I'll continue. Now we are like sharing



the car. He's going to be more interested on teaching me.

Yeah, I think it's really good. I still have a lot to learn from Scott Dixon.

Q. I have to ask, did you acquire any new KFC sponsorship on your outfit or on the car this year?

ALEX PALOU: Not yet. We are working on it, yeah (smiling).

Q. At Long Beach last year you cited three or four potential areas where you still reckon there's room for improvement. Speaking to Julian over the winter, he said the only thing you really need to do is gain more experience on ovals. Are you able to share what any of the other two or three things that you still want to improve on are or is that still a secret?

ALEX PALOU: I'm not going to get a lot into details obviously.

But, yeah, I think ovals obviously. I think I've done maybe a bit less than 10 oval races during my career between 2020 and 2021. Maybe just 10. I have a long way of getting more experience, knowing how to race, getting the confidence once we get to a new or different track.

Yeah, oval is a good part. Qualifying, I think it's another part. Starting more up front, getting one-lap speed should be a priority for us. We've always been able - not always - but constantly able to be around Fast 6 or top 10, which is great. We only got one pole position.

Hopefully that's going to improve and make our life easier during the races.

Q. Did you feel your performance at both Indy and when you were going through the field at Gateway like a rocket, does that give you a lot of encouragement that the ovals will come quickly to you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure. Indy was a really big learning curve for me since I started with crash in qualifying. We got the confidence back. Suddenly we were leading the Indy 500 not knowing how.

I think having a bit more experience would have made the position one a little bit better. It was great. I think it was good to learn from Helio.

Gateway was really good. I was surprised with how the car was handling and how easy it was to get through the field. Yeah, hopefully when we go to Texas, Iowa and again Indy, I'm going to have more confidence and we're going to

be able to start more up front and try and win my first oval race.

Q. Obviously you're going into the season as defending champion. Does that give you added pressure or are you relaxed a little bit going into the season knowing you've already won the championship?

ALEX PALOU: No, as I said before, it doesn't really add pressure. It's not that I'm relaxed either. Just winning one championship, it means but it doesn't mean a lot. You need to continue winning races and championships to still be valued as a champion.

Yeah, I think it's going to be good having the target in our car. It's always good when people is chasing you. But 2022 is going to be brand-new. We're going to start everybody with zero points, with new people around us, new teams, new tracks that we'll go to as well.

Yeah, should be a fun year.

Q. What are you expecting from the Rolex? It usually draws a big field. You're going to go as the INDYCAR champion. Is that going to give you some swagger in that paddock?

ALEX PALOU: I'm really excited. It's going to be my first 24 hour race. It's going to be big. Having my first 24 hours being in Daytona with DPi and the team I am, with the drivers I'm sharing, it's going to be pretty awesome. I'm really, really excited. I think it's going to be a great event. I cannot wait to be there on track and start doing laps.

Q. You've raced some other stuff since INDYCAR ended, right?

ALEX PALOU: Yes. I only did one race just because there was no more. I did one race, I don't know how you call it here, but it was dirt, it was on dirt. It was my first race on dirt in Spain. Yeah, I didn't do really well. I was fast, but I didn't know how to race. It was fun. We'll do more at the end of the year.

Q. You had some adversity last year with some engine penalties, second GP at IMS, what happened at Gateway. Where did you learn to rebound from that? Each time you came back from having those poor events.

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. I guess I've been through tough times when I was a kid in go-kart racing. I don't mean personal, I mean professionally. You learn that it's about perseverance and always being up there willing to

work, working harder.

At the end of the day we do, what, 17 races. We won the championship and only won three races. You're going to have a lot of bad days before you win the championship or before the great days come.

Yeah, I don't know. It's been working good. I'm living my dream and doing what I love to do. Yeah, that's not going to change.

Q. Last year on these calls someone asked you whether you (indiscernible) Fernando Alonso to be the first Spaniard to win a race. You got some pushback saying it was you. A year later you delivered most of the wins. You talked about how you were received in Spain. I would be curious if you could expand what returning to your home country was like, if you feel you've been starting to get a little bit more respect in the motorsports world in America or back home?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I remember that question. The day after was like, Alex is saying he's going to be the only Spanish guy to win a race next year.

I was like, No.

Yeah, I think it worked out. I just said that because I was convinced that I had a great team around me and that we had the chance to win the first one. INDYCAR was starting before F1.

I think it's going to be still the same this year. INDYCAR is growing in Spain and Europe, I think also in the U.S. People are realizing how challenging and how fun the races are.

Yeah, hopefully we can do it again and we can have a good year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Alex, for your time.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

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